3; Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
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which they sing their own hymns. . . . The first shout that we witnessed . . . impressed us very much. The large gloomy room, with its blackened walls—the wild whirling dance of the shouters,—the crowd of dark, eager faces gathered around,—the figure of the old blind man, whose excitement could hardly be controlled, and whose attitude and gestures while singing were very fine—and over all, the red glare of the burning pine-knot, which shed a circle of light around it, but only seemed to deepen and darken the shadows in the other parts of the room,—these all formed a wild, strange, and deeply impressive picture, not soon to be forgotten.[39]

Only members of the Praise House could join in the ring shout. Children were taught the shout at a very early age but never allowed to participate in or attend religious gatherings where the shout was performed until they became Praise House members. Once membership was attained, the new converts were welcomed into the Praise House by the opportunity to lead the ring shout and illustrate their ability.[40]

Most Northern teachers were at first appalled when they observed the shout. "I never saw anything so savage," wrote Laura Towne. "They call it a religious ceremony, but it seems more like a regular frolic to me." "The shout reminds one of a pagan performance," wrote a Ladies Island teacher. Arthur Sumner referred to it as "a strange, barbaric Central-African dance and song." Yet Gullahs insisted that the shout was religious and that each movement and step had spiritual significance. The steps never changed and even after freedom the shout was not altered by maneuvers that might have been learned at a "worldly dance." A watchful leader made sure that the feet were never crossed. Some whites, after coming to know and understand the Gullahs, reversed their initial critical stance. Laura Towne spent the rest of her life with the Gullahs after going there during the Civil War. She grew to love and respect the Gullahs enough to appreciate their forms of expression. "Went to a fine shout today," she wrote in her diary after a few years' stay on the Sea Islands.[41]

The Gullah ring shout, like the travel and the vision, involved an altered state of consciousness and had the attributes of "possession." It represented either an unusual behavior inspired and controlled by an outside agent, in this case the Holy Spirit, or the outside agent displaced the individual's personality and acted in its stead.[42] The background of the Gullah ring shout, a manifestation of possession trance, was West African in origin and an important characteristic of the initiation process.

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
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It houses several collections especially relevant to island residents, including the Esau Jenkins papers. In 1987 we placed more than sixty hours of recorded material, along with prints of Robert Yellin's masterful photographs at the center. We wanted people from the islands, as well as scholars, to have access to this material.

In 1963 Esau Jenkins told us:

> Now some of us, because we can read a little bit more, forget about the place we came from and some of the songs which help us go on. And when older folks sang those songs, it helped them realize they're trusting in God and reaching for a better day. We certainly wouldn't want the children to get away from it. We should cherish it, we should preserve it and keep it. . . .
>
> Now if we hide those sweet songs and try to get away from what we came from, what will we tell our children about the achievement we have made and the distance we have come?

In 1988 we noticed a plaque in the office of Bill Jenkins, Esau's oldest son and the administrator of the Sea Island Comprehensive Health Care Corporation:*

> A people who have not the pride to record their history will not long have the virtues to make history worth recording; and no people who are indifferent to their past need hope to make their future great.

There really is treasure here—honey in the rock. Our hope is that it will always be a part of the islands and a source of strength to island people as they struggle with the pressures and challenges of the present and the future.

*The authors' royalties from the Brown Thrasher edition of *Ain't You Got a Right to the Tree of Life?* are going to the Tree of Life Fund administered by the Comprehensive Health Care Corporation in support of cultural activities in the community.

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4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
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Mrs. Janie Hunter

THEY WANT ME TO TALK ABOUT THE PAST

159 178 867 869 829

I tell you, young people got a lot chance to think more in their age than I had to think in my days. 'Cause I couldn't think 'bout nothing but plant peas and corn in my days. But now these children got so much different thing to go through and learn, and they got nice schools. If they don't learn, it's nobody's fault but their own. Then I try to teach them these stories and different song and let them know what blues was like in my days coming up. My children like it. They sit down and they want me to talk about the past. They enjoy hearing it. I want them to know about it, so when I gone there be somebody to carry it on.

Mrs. Isabel Simmons

LIFE IS VERY DIFFERENT NOW

178 829 [illegible] 178 829 209

The old times was hard, but we still need religion right now. Life is very different now.

There is so much television here now; you didn't had that. It don't make life easier for me; it make 'em hard 'cause people stay home more. Lot don't go to church and different thing because they stay for see story. In them time only story you would hear tell, you tell your own story. This time, you watch television for story.

And the children now, they watch the TV and they take the thing on the TV to do just what they doing now. They think what is on the TV is real. But them time there doesn't be that kind of killing and shooting and cutting up like what going on now. Once in a while you hear about somebody die, but don't never hear about nobody get killed.

Mrs. Alice Wine

EVERYBODY SITTING ON THEIR OWN STOOPS

178 829 571 574

'Course that day, coming in 1919, all around like that, people was more friendly to one another. People come and sit with you and read the Bible. But these days you don't find anybody come visit. Everybody sitting on their own stoops. You don't find nobody to my house. When you're sick, people used to go around and have meeting for you and pray for you. Now the people who live in the house with the sick people got to come and ask somebody come pray for them. But before, people know you is sick. Not now. That's done pass.

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN2
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mrs. Isabel Simmons

ALL JOIN AND MAKE THAT HALL

The only time they miss me at that hall, I either sick or off on some church duty. That hall mean a whole lot to me. It give me strength, spirit to carry on. I know everybody who comes. Some is friends, cousins, sisters, some neighbors.

I remember when Moving Star Hall was built, 'round about 1913, '14. Father help build the hall. Mother too. We all throw money until we gets enough to buy the land. All pay seven dollars for the lumber. All join and make that hall. They used to have prayer service in the house—only family then. Afterward, they began to have joint class from house to house. Then when we get the hall, we begin to have meeting there.

My daddy teach we how to sing, teach we how to shout, teach we how to go fast, teach we how to go slow. And then going to meeting, or later going to church, he'll teach we how to behave yourself when we get out to different place, before we leave home.

Used to be plenty people there—all them old people. They sing those old time spiritual, better than how we sing it now. Joe Bligen and Levy Green. Joe Deas was a good singer too, when he was much younger. Had plenty of singing womans, too.

That hall be full of people. Every Sunday. We have meeting in the neighborhood three time a week—Sunday and Tuesday and Thursday night. They keep a meeting going from eight until twelve. Then I get out, tomorrow morning I go on the farm make a day's work, too.

4: Caravan & Caravan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
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South Carolina
Johns Island

Mr. Benjamin Bligen

I REALIZE I'M HERE FOR SOME PURPOSE

159 794 I was about twenty-seven when I start to go to Moving Star Hall regular. Since I was a little boy, Mom used to take me there on her back—I was so small to walk in the dark, you know.

159 794 There was a time when blues was all that was on my mind. But the truth is the light, and after getting old in age I realize that I'm here for some purpose. Father always teach me the Bible, teach us how to sing and how to pray, and tell us what must not do and what must do to inherit life everlasting. So I stop and ask myself some question. Then I just had to change from singing blues and begin to go back to what my old parents said—singing spiritual songs.

And I found out that's better.

Mr. William Saunders

THIS IS GOOD, BUT IT DOESN'T HELP YOUR EATING

159 794 We all as kids went to Moving Star Hall. As far as I was concerned, I just had to be there. We used to enjoy the singing and the shouting. And at a certain period of the night, all the youngsters in there had to go up front and kneel down and everybody prayed. That place used to be full—three nights a week. You couldn't get in that place if you be late on Sunday nights. And it was so much young people. All of a sudden it just start dying off.

For one thing most of the young people started going away. Like me, I went in the Army. I was about fifteen. Once the kids start going to different places, and we start to be more enlightened, then we start getting away from this old type of thing. As we get more education, we come to find out that this wasn't the type of thing we needed to help us through the world. We needed more than this. This is good, but it doesn't help your eating. Why waste time with something that you aren't gonna get anything out of at all? You gonna be looking forward to when you die, and man, you hungry now.

That Moving Star Hall business just about died out completely. Then they started building it back up again. Now some of the people, the Moving Star Hall Singers, are enjoying some of the fruit of their labor.

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mrs. Janie Hunter

WHAT I KNOW I TRY TO TEACH MY CHILDREN

When I come up, my parents sat us down on Sunday afternoon after church and taught us stories, and their life stories—how they came up. Some of my great-grandparents came up in slavery times, and all these stories and folktales that I tell are from way back in the history of slavery times.

And what I know I try to teach my children—my seven daughters and six sons, and ninety-five grandchildren, and twenty-four great-grands, so as the generations go on, it won't die out. I think the past is very important for them to understand. We don't know what the future will bring. So maybe the future will bring back the past. There's a lot of people on this island, older than I am, they know all about the past, but they feel so embarrassed to explain about it. They figure people are going to look down on them as nothing. But I always say, "I am just what I am." And what I want my children to know that when I'm gone, my children can teach their children.

So I have over thirty head of children come to my home on Sunday afternoons and I teach them different things that it's important for them to know. They rather hear stories and folktales. I think if all the mothers would teach what they know, they would keep their children out of trouble. They would have something to build upon. They'd have something to look forward to. But to just turn them loose and not let them know what to expect, that's why children be in so much shock when things happen to them. It's our parents' task to teach our children.

The songs tell stories too—the religious songs and the blues songs. Those songs gave us a feeling to go on. That's all we had to live by. We sang and the games we played. We didn't go to piccolo or none of that—there wasn't any of that in those times. We take a tub and washboard and make our own music. On Sunday evening my father's house was full up. We sing and shout and feel good about it. We had a good time. We didn't be sick. We didn't get in no trouble. Everybody loved one another. And we still love to sing. That is our talent God bless us with. We love to sing and we love people. We love to get along with everybody. We was brought up like that.

41 Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
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Mr. Benjamin Bligen

I FIND NO FAULT LIVING HERE ON THE ISLAND

823 Johns Island is my home. I was born and raised here and it's peaceful. I've traveled across different parts of the world and I love different places, but I love Johns Island the best. There's peace and quiet here and nice places to go if you feel like travel. You can go in the river. You can go swimming if you want to. You can go fishing if you want to. You can go crabbing if you want to do that. You can go and sing and shout if you want to; no one to stop you. I find no fault living here on the island. I love it here. I make up my mind to be here until the Lord make a change in my life, to take me on home.

533 The singing brings joy to your soul. Regardless of how much you feel down and you feel like you can't move, you start singing one of those songs and it brings joy to your soul and lifts you up. You start thinking about the good things, and we realize we've got somebody on our side. We're trying to pass it on to the younger folks so they can carry the old traditions on. Our old folks taught us these songs and they would like for we to carry it on through and they would like for we to pass it on to the young generation so they can keep it up. And I hope that many and many that come to our different churches will hear these songs and sing these songs and will be able to carry it on when the older ones have passed on out of this world.

178 186

771 869 It's a different time now than when I was growing up. It's harder now to get the young people to come on the old side. My family had a strong religion. I try to keep on the road that they was traveling on and do the things they want me to do. Hopefully, I will be able to teach the young people the way that my old folks taught me, that they will have something that will stand by them when trouble rise. Whatever comes up against them in life they will have something to hold onto, something that will deliver them in the time of their need.